

Message

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E&E Greenwire

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Pruitt event showed 'disrespect for the free press' — groups

By Maxine Joselow, 4/5/18

Two of the country's leading professional associations for journalists are sounding the alarm about the exclusion of several media outlets from U.S. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's remarks Tuesday.

"It's part of a larger pattern of disrespect for the free press," Society of Environmental Journalists President Bobby Magill told E&E News.

"Press conferences should be open to all media, and the EPA in particular seems to be picking and choosing which media outlets it prefers to cover it at these events," Magill said.

Kathryn Foxhall, a member of the Society of Professional Journalists' Freedom of Information Committee, told E&E News, "We're extremely concerned."

"We can't help but believe that it is manipulation of the news media, and therefore manipulation of the public," Foxhall said.

Pruitt touted EPA's reconsideration of clean car standards during a closed-door gathering in the Rachel Carson Green Room at EPA headquarters (Greenwire, April 3).

Many media outlets — including E&E News — didn't receive press releases about it. And requests to attend went unanswered.

EPA tweeted at 9:33 a.m. the link to a livestream of the event that began at 10:30 a.m.

CNN reported that the agency initially tried to limit television network access to Fox News. But Fox alerted the four other major networks — CNN, ABC, NBC and CBS — and a pool was established.

"Given the fact that Fox News has been seen as more supportive of this administration than other outlets, it has a very bad appearance to it," Foxhall said.

"It is heartening to hear that Fox alerted the other networks," she added. "Even in our most competitive mode, that kind of solidarity for basic access among the press is extremely important. I would congratulate Fox News on this."

After Pruitt spoke for less than six minutes, he didn't take any questions.

Asked about access to the event, EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox said, "We invited Bloomberg, CBS, Daily Signal, Detroit News, Fox, Gray-TV, Sacramento Bee, USA Today [and] Wall Street Journal, and other outlets that showed up unannounced including The New York Times and ABC were welcomed into our midterm evaluation announcement."

The limited media access comes as Pruitt faces intense scrutiny over reports of premium travel, high-price security and ties to lobbyists (Greenwire, April 3). At least two Republicans have called for the EPA boss to resign (E&E News PM, April 3).

Magill said SEJ's Freedom of Information task force would consider sending the agency another letter expressing concern. The task force already sent EPA spokeswoman Liz Bowman a Monday missive urging her to answer reporters' questions about Pruitt's proposal to limit the use of science in agency rulemaking.

"When it seems that SEJ members are being significantly affected by roadblocks and lack of transparency from federal agencies, if it's a big enough deal, we'll definitely write a letter," Magill said.